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425+ San Antonio Corpsmen, Army Medic Students Honored With Thanksgiving Dinner At Valero HQ

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By Larry Coffey, Navy Medicine Education and Training Command



Capt. Gail Hathaway (far left), commander, Navy Medicine Education and Training Command; and Col. Jonathan Fristoe (far right), commander, Naval Medical Center and School, with Valero Corporation employees and family members who volunteered to provide a traditional Thanksgiving dinner for the medical students. Hathaway and Fristoe presented the volunteers framed and mounted letters of appreciation.

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Approximately 425 Navy hospital corps and Army medic students from the Medical Education and Training Campus at Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA) Fort Sam Houston were provided a traditional holiday meal on Thanksgiving Day by volunteers from Valero Corporation. This marked the ninth year of the "Thanksgiving with the Troops" event at Valero's international corporate headquarters in San Antonio and the second year Navy Medicine students participated with the Army, said Eric Andres, a Valero employee and the event coordinator. Approximately 200 Valero employees and families served the food and provided door prizes and entertainment. Leftover meals were donated to a Veterans of Foreign War (VFW) post in the San Antonio area.

Capt. Gail Hathaway, who manages Navy Medicine's formal education and training programs as the commander of Navy Medicine Education and Training Command in San Antonio, said, "The separation from family that the military experiences can sometimes be difficult. Community volunteer efforts like this make it easier for our young Sailors and Soldiers during the holidays. Plus, it shows our troops that the community supports them and appreciates their sacrifice." This volunteer effort included over 250 pounds of turkey, 125 pounds of potatoes, and 100 pounds each of green beans, corn and dressing along with gravy, rolls and a full dessert buffet. The Navy and Army enlisted medical students watched football games and parades on big screens during dinner. They also competed in localized game shows like Jeopardy, and students played card and board games such as poker, blackjack and Uno. Winners earned tickets that were placed in a basket and drawn at the end of the afternoon along with other door prizes. The competition was highlighted by the "Military's Got Talent" karaoke contest. Pvt. Brandon Spaulding, an Army combat medic student who participated in poker, said,

"They really went all out and are making us feel comfortable. The food is awesome, the baked goods are amazing, and the festivities here are great." Seaman Recruit Brandon Bustamanate, a Hospital Corpsman "A" School student, was another of several Navy and Army students at the poker table. "I've only been here in school for about a week and a half," Bustamanate said. "But I've enjoyed getting out of school today, coming out and having fun, blowing off a little steam." Valero Employee and Volunteer Charlie Dominguez was the dealer at Bustamanate and Spaulding's table.

"The reason we can enjoy the things we do is because we have these young men and women out there protecting us. It's really great that we can do this for them," Dominguez said. "I think it's phenomenal that employees of a Fortune 500 company would come in on Thanksgiving and do this for the military," added Col. Jonathan Fristoe, commander of the JBSA Fort Sam Houston-based 32nd Medical Brigade, U.S. Army Medical Department Center and School.

"It's really a demonstration of what San Antonio calls the Military City USA in action. It's a tremendous opportunity for the Soldiers and Sailors to get out of the barracks, to get off post, to come out here and get a little bit of a taste of home." But in the end, the Valero volunteers gained perhaps even more from the Thanksgiving Day events as did the Soldiers and Sailors. "Thanksgiving with the Troops is an uplifting volunteer event," Andres said. "Our volunteers are able to show our local military community firsthand how thankful we are for their service. It is the least we can do to give our Sailors and Soldiers a home away from home for a few hours."

NMETC is the sole point of accountability for formal Navy Medicine education and training services, and is part of the Navy Medicine team, a global health care network of Navy medical professionals around the world who provide high-quality health care to eligible beneficiaries. Navy Medicine personnel deploy with Sailors and Marines worldwide, providing critical mission support aboard ships, in the air, under the sea and on the battlefield.

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